

**Estimating the Cost  
to the County of San Diego, California,  
of Services Delivered to Undocumented  
Immigrants During FY 2006-07**

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**Prepared for the County of San Diego**

September 2007

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## Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support and coordination of Sarah Aghassi, Director of the Office of Strategy & Intergovernmental Affairs for the County of San Diego. We also express our appreciation to the members of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, especially Fifth District Supervisor Bill Horn. Caroline Smith from Supervisor Horn's office was very helpful. Also key to our access to appropriate staff was the assistance from Donald Steuer, Chief Financial Officer of the County.

We are very appreciative of the time and effort devoted to this project by those individuals who were interviewed: Rick Wanne, Ellen Schmedling, Dr. Amethyst Cureg, Gayle White, Dr. Michele Ginsburg, Janet L. Seawell, Kyersten King, Commander Ken Culver, Dr. Philip Hanger, Dr. Natalie Pearl, Anthony Gates, Yvette Klepin, Rick Poggemeyer, Michelle Bush, Cathy Neville, Elena Lepule, Sandy Grimsley, Gwenmarie Hilleary, Pam Walker, Adrienne Yancey, Michael Dececchi, Terry Cunningham, Patty Kay Danon, Linda Lake, Suzette St. Pierre, Wendy Maramba, Pam Elias, Dr. Kathleen Moser, Michael Adkins, Steve Carroll, Joy Tyrell, Frank Special, Gary Erbeck, Dr. Bruce Haynes, Vince Garcia, and Jaye Yoshinos. The assistance provided by Dorothy Thrush and Terry Hogan is also very much appreciated. Note, however, that the authors of this report bear responsibility for the results and their interpretation, not the individuals who were interviewed.

Finally, we acknowledge the cooperation of the United States/Mexico Border Counties Coalition (BCC) in allowing this report to combine the work that the authors are doing for the BCC with the additional research that was incorporated into this research.

This work was completed under County Agreement Number 37152 to John R. Weeks, Ph.D.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Researchers have tried with some difficulty to measure the presence of undocumented immigrants within American communities, and their economic impact on those communities. Intuitively, we know that undocumented persons may contribute to the tax base, but they also consume public services. Whether or not there is a net cost or gain is the subject of debate. Local governments, especially those along the border, are in the unenviable position of having to serve needy or criminal undocumented persons who enter the community illegally as a result of failed border controls or federal immigration policy. It is reasonable and even prudent for local government officials to want to understand just how heavy an economic burden they bear as a result of federal policymaking and to redress what can be the imposition of considerable costs for health, welfare and criminal justice services.

This report is in direct response to Supervisor Horn's request for information on the costs of medical and social services provided to undocumented immigrants, but it also incorporates the results from the Border Counties Coalition study in regard to the costs to the county of processing criminal illegal immigrants. However, it is emphasized that calculating the costs associated with undocumented persons is not meant to suggest that they are more likely to be criminals than other people, or less healthy than other persons. Indeed, at least one recent study has shown that immigrants to the United States are less likely to be incarcerated than are people born in the United States. However, even if crime rates are low, or health utilization rates are low, undocumented immigrants impose costs on the taxpayers of San Diego County that are higher than they would be if those persons had not been in the country and living in San Diego County. Note also that undocumented immigrants impact the educational system, but schools are not under the purview of County Boards of Supervisors in the State of California, and the educational impact is not incorporated into this analysis. Furthermore, most health care costs associated with undocumented immigrants are not direct costs to the county government.

The undocumented immigrant population has been growing more quickly than the total population of San Diego County and thus it has been increasing as a fraction of the total population in San Diego County. The estimates suggest that in 1990, undocumented immigrants accounted for 3.2 percent of the county's population, but by 2007 this is estimated to have more than doubled to 6.8 percent, with an estimated 209,930 undocumented immigrants living in the county as of 2007.

The methods used in this study were similar to those used in the 2000 Border Counties Coalition analysis of criminal justice costs of undocumented immigrants in border counties. The approach is a direct one, in that

we interviewed the administrators of those County of San Diego programs that might potentially provide services to, or be affected by, undocumented immigrants. Administrators interviewed included those in the Public Safety Group, the Health and Human Services Agency, and, within the Land Use and Environment Group, the Parks and Recreation Department. Each person interviewed was asked to describe the type of services provided by their agency, and then was asked whether or not they or their staff members had a specific way to estimate the percentage of their client/patient base that might be composed of undocumented immigrants. Most agencies do not ask about, or keep track of, the legal residency status of people whom they serve, and as a result most persons interviewed were not able to provide us with an exact number. Thus, in the course of the in-person interviews and follow-up correspondence, we analyzed the information provided to us to generate our best guess as to the overall impact percentage. It is thus important to keep in mind that these estimates are “soft” because most agencies do not ask about immigration status. It is also the case, however, that much of the discussion about the impact centered around an impact of 10 percent. Different people at different times mentioned that number as a reasonable estimate of the impact on their program, even in the absence of “hard” data. Thus, we tended to fall back to that percentage in those instances where it was otherwise difficult to assign an impact in a program where it was nonetheless believed by staff that there was a measurable impact. Once a percentage impact was estimated, that was applied to the approved budget for that agency for the 2006 fiscal year. We also accounted for the fact that each county agency has indirect support from other county administrative offices and we used indirect cost rates per agency that were provided to us by the County. The sum of the impact times the budget plus the indirect government cost equaled the total dollar impact of undocumented immigrants.

**The total estimated impact of undocumented immigrants on County government is \$101,494,401 for fiscal year 2006-07. Of this, \$75,010,931 is attributable to costs associated with the criminal justice impact of undocumented immigrants, and the remainder (\$26,483,470) is due to health and human service and environmental impacts.**

**The total impact of \$101 million can be divided by the estimated number of undocumented immigrants in 2006 to produce a per undocumented immigrant impact of \$527 per year. Looked at from the taxpayer cost perspective, the cost per legal resident of San Diego County in 2006 was \$35.31.**

If the number of undocumented immigrants in 2006 had been still the same as estimated for 1990, then the county would have spent \$34 million in 2006 dealing with undocumented immigrants, instead of \$101 million. A tripling of such immigrants obviously triples their absolute impact on county government.

Since the total population of the county was growing more slowly than the undocumented immigrant population, the result is a noticeable rise over time in the per person impact on county residents. In 1990, the impact per legal resident would have been \$17.53, whereas by 2007 it has increased to \$38.15.

The limitations of our data and analysis must be kept in mind when interpreting our results. Our calculations are based on estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants per year in the county, rather than a direct count (which will probably never exist). Our estimates of the impact on county services are made difficult by the fact that most agencies do not keep records of the legal status of people served. Indeed, in some cases, they are expressly forbidden from doing so. Thus, it is probably impossible to ever know the exact impact of undocumented immigrants.

Another important community cost associated with the children of undocumented immigrants, if not undocumented immigrants themselves, is for education. The education of all children is vital to the economic development of the county and these costs are almost certainly inflated on a per student basis when the parents lack legal status and may have less ability to support their children's educational program. However, as noted previously, these are community costs that are not borne by County government.

It is likely that the single biggest cost to the county (but not to the county government) of undocumented immigrants is unreimbursed emergency medical care. The Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties has estimated that 25 percent of emergency room admissions in San Diego County are undocumented immigrants. According to Hospital Association estimates, the uncompensated ER care for FY 2006 was \$619,665,764. The Association has no estimate of in-patient care cost for undocumented persons. Applying the uncompensated care cost to the impact of 25.0 percent produces a direct cost of 154,916,441. This is a cost of \$804 per undocumented immigrant in 2006; or \$53.90 per legal resident of the county. This represents a genuinely substantial impact to the community, but it is not a direct impact on the costs of County government.

To the extent that the 2006 estimate of unreimbursed emergency medical costs is comparable to the 2001 estimate produced by the Border Counties Coalition, the data suggest that the cost per undocumented immigrant has risen considerably from \$607 in 2001 (expressed in constant dollars), to \$804 in 2006. The cost of these services per legal resident increased from \$27.83 in 2001 (expressed in constant dollars) to \$53.90 in 2006—nearly a doubling in only five years, although as noted above this is a community expense, but not a county government expense.

The increase in health costs associated with undocumented immigrants is consistent with our calculations that the costs related to the processing of criminal undocumented immigrants have also increased, and these latter costs are borne directly by County government. As noted above, we estimate that \$75 million was spent from the San Diego County general fund in processing criminal undocumented immigrants in FY 2006. Thus, each resident of the county paid approximately \$24.50 to fund these services. This represented a substantial absolute dollar increase from the estimated impact of \$34,152,708 for the comparable services in FY 1999, which amounted to \$11.96 per resident. This is a huge increase over time, even taking the increase in prices into account over that time. In constant dollars, the 1999 figure would have inflated from \$34 million to \$41 million in 2006. This means that, even taking the consumer price index into account, over this span of time there was nearly a doubling of the impact of criminal undocumented immigrants on the residents of San Diego County. This is not too surprising, since our estimates suggest that the undocumented immigrant population itself nearly doubled over this period of time—from 110,965 in 1999 to 192,654 in 2006. Yet, it can be seen that the costs per undocumented have nonetheless increased even faster than the immigrant population itself, presumably reflecting an increase in the costs to the County of its overall operations.

We conclude with the reminder that our focus in this report has been to estimate the costs to the County government associated with undocumented immigrants. There is no question that undocumented immigrants earn money that is spent within the county and thus they make a variety of economic contributions to the county. We did not attempt in this study to estimate how much of that is returned directly to the County as revenue, which would be the relevant calculation given our focus on County government impacts.

# **Estimating the Cost to the County of San Diego, California, of Services Delivered to Undocumented Immigrants During FY 2006-07**

## **I INTRODUCTION**

Researchers have tried with some difficulty to measure the presence of undocumented immigrants within American communities, and their economic impact on those communities. Intuitively, we know that undocumented persons may contribute to the tax base, but they also consume public services. Whether or not there is a net cost or gain is the subject of debate. Local governments, especially those along the border, are in the unenviable position of having to serve needy or criminal undocumented persons who enter the community illegally as a result of failed border controls or federal immigration policy. It is reasonable and even prudent for local government officials to want to understand just how heavy an economic burden they bear as a result of federal policymaking and to redress what can be the imposition of considerable costs for health, welfare and criminal justice services.

Immigration policy and enforcement is the responsibility of the Federal government, but the consequences of those policies and enforcement activities wind up being borne by local communities, as a consequence of the Federal government failing to fully acknowledge its financial responsibility for the actions of people who are in the country illegally. Undocumented immigrants may create a nearly invisible, yet substantial, fiscal burden on local governments (and thus local taxpayers) through their unauthorized use of locally tax-supported health and social services, and through the expenses borne as a result of processing undocumented immigrants who commit, or are alleged to commit, crimes within San Diego County.

In May of 2006, Supervisor Bill Horn reported that when preparing his State of the County speech that year, he had been unable to find a current figure on the cost to the County of San Diego of providing services to undocumented immigrants. “He wants to know the costs, so the county can present the federal government with a bill” (Branscomb 2006:B1). Although undocumented immigrants contribute to the local economy, it is not clear how much of that contribution comes back directly to the county as revenue that would offset the direct county expenditures made by taxpayers on behalf of the immigrants. Supervisor Greg Cox noted at the time that the United States/Mexico Border Counties Coalition (BCC) was in the process of updating its 2000 report on the costs to all U.S. counties along the border of providing services to undocumented immigrants. However, that study, in which the authors of this report are participating, is funded only to look at the costs associated with the processing of criminal illegal documents, and will not examine the costs associated with medical and social services. This report is in direct response to Supervisor Horn’s request for the information on the costs of medical and social services provided to undocumented immigrants, but it also incorporates the results from the Border Counties Coalition study in regard to the costs to the county of processing criminal illegal immigrants.

It is important to keep in mind that all of the estimates discussed in this report must be viewed with a certain amount of caution. Some funding sources, like Title III of the Older Americans Act Amendments of 1973, explicitly prohibit providers from asking eligibility questions that might interfere with participants availing themselves of needed services. Thus, in some cases, where County funds are intermingled with state or

federal funds, eligibility rules may interfere with asking about immigration status. In the absence of a uniform requirement or consensus on collecting immigration status data, most County programs simply do not collect the data. Complicating this issue is the fact that some program needs transcend borders and, irrespective of the legal status of the recipient, the County would still find that it was in the taxpayers' best interest that services be provided. For example, the County tuberculosis (TB) program may provide treatment to an undocumented person with active TB, because failure to do so could put San Diego County communities at risk. Furthermore, while there almost certainly will be an additional cost associated with serving undocumented persons, as we calculate in this report, it is difficult to know exactly how program budgets are related to the presence of undocumented immigrants. In some cases, such persons may require a disproportionately large amount of time, whereas in other instances the additional costs may be minimal.

We also want to emphasize that in calculating the costs associated with undocumented persons, we are not suggesting that they are more likely to be criminals than other people, or less healthy than other persons. Indeed, at least one recent study has shown that immigrants to the United States are less likely to be incarcerated than are people born in the U.S. (Rumbaut *et al.* 2006), and other research has demonstrated the superior health levels of immigrants from Mexico (Rumbaut and Weeks 1996; Rumbaut and Weeks 1998; Smith and Bradshaw 2005; Weeks and Rumbaut 1991; Weeks, Rumbaut, and Ojeda 1999). Our point is that, even if crime rates are low, or health utilization rates are low, undocumented immigrants impose costs on the taxpayers of San Diego County that are higher than they would be if those persons had not been in the country and living in San Diego County.

## **SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S BORDER ENVIRONMENT**

San Diego County lies at the southwest corner of the United States; at the western end of the U.S.-Mexico border. It contains 4,204 square miles of territory and shares 60 miles of border with Mexico. The population is concentrated to the west of the Laguna Mountains, more specifically within 25 miles of the Pacific Ocean. The City of San Diego accounts for somewhat less than half (43 percent) of the county's population of 3.1 million and it is one of the two incorporated areas in the county that are adjacent to the border. Altogether, the county has 18 incorporated cities. The others include, in order of population size, Chula Vista, Oceanside, Escondido, Carlsbad, El Cajon, Vista, San Marcos, National City, Encinitas, La Mesa, Santee, Poway, Imperial Beach (the other incorporated area of the county that is adjacent to the border), Coronado, Lemon Grove, Solana Beach, and Del Mar. The incorporated areas take in 2.6 million (84 percent) of the county's 3.1 million people, with the remaining 16 percent residing in unincorporated areas.

The Mexican state of Baja California shares its entire northern border with the two California border counties. In turn, San Diego and Imperial Counties are adjacent only to Baja California, which geographically is a peninsular extension of the state of California. The Mexican population south of San Diego County is clustered primarily in the large city of Tijuana and the smaller cities of Tecate, Playas de Rosarito and Ensenada, although the latter two cities are not adjacent to the border. The 2005 Mexico *Conteo* enumerated 2.0 million people in those four cities combined. Three ports of entry operate in San Diego County: two of them at Tijuana and one at Tecate. The San Ysidro border crossing between San Diego and Tijuana has for many years been the world's busiest international crossing. Among the three San Diego ports of entry there are an annual average of 10 million pedestrians who cross the border, and 53 million passengers crossing in vehicles.



Since 1997 San Diego County has experienced a decrease in the number of apprehensions of undocumented immigrants. This is a direct consequence of the extension of the border fence in the more accessible regions of southern San Diego County through the federally-funded Operation Gatekeeper project. It has not necessarily deterred illegal border crossing, but rather has pushed it east, into the mountains of San Diego County, into the desert in Imperial County, and farther east into Arizona and New Mexico. Nonetheless, because of the size of the San Diego economy and its function as a gateway to the vastly larger economy in Los Angeles, the number of illegal immigrants coming into San Diego County remains a serious concern. In 2006, nearly 80,000 persons without documents were apprehended trying to cross the border into San Diego County.

## **WHY DO WE HAVE UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS?**

Spaniards were the first Europeans to make significant attempts to colonize the area now known as California and in the process nearly eliminated the sparsely settled indigenous population. When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, California became a part of Mexico, but there was relatively little interest in settling the region until gold was discovered in 1848. That occurred at the same time that Mexico was ceding territory to the United States as a result of the Mexican-American Wars of 1846-48. American statehood for California quickly followed the discovery of gold, and California entered the Union in 1850. The state remained relatively isolated from the rest of the country until 1868, when the transcontinental railroad was completed. The real “gold” of California turned out to be its rich agricultural resources, supplemented later by the discovery of oil resources in the state.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1900, the population of the state was 1.5 million, representing less than 2 percent of the U.S. population, and there were 20 states that were more populous. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, California was far and away the most populous state in America, with its 35 million people, according to the 2005 American Community Survey, accounting for more than 12 percent of the total U.S. population. Migrants from Mexico, and especially their offspring, have made a substantial contribution to that growth since the 1970s. In 1970, the state’s 2.4 million Hispanics represented 12 percent of California’s population, whereas by the year 2005 the estimate of the Hispanic population was 12.5 million, accounting for 35 percent of the state’s population. The Demographic Research Unit of the California State Department of Finance projects that by 2010 the Hispanic population will just equal the non-Hispanic white population at 15 million each, and by 2040 Hispanics will represent the majority in the state’s population (California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit 2004).

Population growth in Mexico has led to a situation in which the Mexican economy cannot generate enough jobs to meet the demands of young people reaching adulthood. At the same time, the more robust California economy has been a nearly constant attraction for Mexicans to enter the state. For the past few decades there has been a clear “demographic fit” between the older age structure with a strong economy in the United States and a young population in Mexico’s struggling economy (see, for example, Weeks 2008). Since the limited number of visas for legal migrants does not match the demand for workers in the U.S., and the process of obtaining legal permission to enter the country can, in all events, often be a lengthy process, the flow of undocumented immigrants is bound to be large. Most undocumented persons in the U.S. from Mexico arrived in the U.S. by illegally crossing the border, whereas undocumented immigrants from most other countries arrive legally in the U.S., but then overstay their visas. Thus, most of the undocumented flow across the border is of Mexican nationals, although there are also some people from other countries who enter Mexico first (either legally or illegally) and then cross illegally into the U.S. from Mexico.

## WHO PAYS?

California county governments represent the largest political subdivision of the state having corporate powers. The specific organizational structure of a county in California will vary from county to county, but each county is required to be governed by an elected Board of Supervisors consisting of five members. California law provides for two kinds of counties--general law and charter. General law counties adhere strictly to state law regarding the number and duties of elected county officials. Charter counties have some latitude or "home rule" with regard to the election of officials, and the administration of the county. Note, however, that in all counties the sheriff, district attorney, and assessor are required to be elected officials. Although charter counties have more flexibility than general law counties, a charter does not give county officials any extra authority over local regulations, revenue-raising abilities, budgetary decisions, or intergovernmental relations. San Diego is a charter county.

It is important to note that in California counties lack some of the powers of self-government that California cities have. In particular, cities have broad revenue generating authority that is not available to counties. Counties may be seen generally as an instrument of state government, but with the added responsibility for the specific health and welfare of residents within the county. In general, the California Constitution authorizes a county to make and enforce local ordinances, as long as they do not conflict with general laws. A county can sue and be sued, purchase and hold land, manage and dispose of its properties, and levy and collect taxes authorized by law.

The single most important source of revenue for the general fund of most California counties comes from state-shared taxes (so-called intergovernmental revenues). The State of California distributes to counties a portion of the state revenues (from sources including state income tax and federal block grants), although this funding comes largely in the form of revenue dedicated to specific programs. General county revenues include property taxes, sales tax, vehicle license fees, transient occupancy tax, real property transfer tax, and a few other miscellaneous sources.

As a result of Proposition 13, passed in 1978, California has a state-wide uniform rate of property tax assessment equal to 1 percent of assessed valuation, plus an amount for the debt service on any bonds approved by popular vote. Assessed value is defined as the "fair market value" and is typically calculated as the property's full cash value as of the date of the latest change in ownership or completion of construction (the "base year value"), adjusted by an annual inflation factor not to exceed two percent per year. The usual taxable value of a property is thus the adjusted base year value or the property's current market value, whichever is lower.

Proposition 13 required the state, rather than local government, to allocate these property tax revenues between competing jurisdictions within a county. The property tax allocation system currently in place was established by the passage in 1979 of Assembly Bill 8. This legislation allocated the property taxes collected at the 1 percent rate to counties, cities, special districts, redevelopment agencies, and schools. A local government's share of the property tax was based initially on the share of the property tax going to that local government before Proposition 13. For example, if a county government received 10 percent of the property taxes collected by all local jurisdictions in that county prior to the passage of Proposition 13, the county government would receive 10 percent of the property taxes collected at the 1 percent rate. However, AB 8 also had a long-term allocation plan built into it to provide local governments with a property tax base that would increase over time as assessed value grew, thereby providing a financing mechanism for growing communities. In this process, the funding of schools was largely de-coupled from property taxes and is now

paid for out of a combination of property taxes and general state revenue. A significant portion of health and welfare costs was also shifted from county to state control.

Sales tax is another important source of local revenue in California counties. At present, the state sales tax rate is 6 percent of taxable sales (non-food items, excluding services). The local county tax rate is an additional 1.25 percent, plus any additional local voter-approved increases, such as in El Cajon, Vista, and National City. The sales tax rate in almost all of San Diego County is 7.75 percent. The state shares a portion of the sales tax with local governments, including counties, and counties keep the sales tax levied in their jurisdiction (the unincorporated areas) for discretionary purposes.

## **WHAT SERVICES ARE MOST IMPACTED BY UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS?**

The county-level services most apt to be impacted by undocumented immigrants are those dealing with the criminal justice system, and the health and welfare system, and it is for this reason that this study, along with prior studies, focuses on these two important areas. In San Diego County in the fiscal year 2006, these two areas accounted for the vast majority of county expenditures. The educational system is also impacted by undocumented immigrants, but County Boards of Supervisors do not oversee school systems in California. All school districts are governed by separately elected Boards.

### **County Law Enforcement and Justice System**

Law enforcement in California counties is shared by several different agencies. The California Highway Patrol operates in every California county, with the mission to ensure safety and provide service to the public as they utilize the highway transportation system and to assist local government during emergencies when requested. Most counties, like San Diego, also have a Sheriff's Department, which enforces laws in unincorporated parts of the county, as well as within municipalities that contract with the Sheriff's Department for those services rather than establishing their own. The Sheriff's department also staffs the sworn officers in the courts. Larger municipalities will fund their own local police agency. Additionally, there are sworn police officers in public and private universities, in community colleges, and in special districts (such as the San Diego Harbor Police). Federal agencies (such as the Border Patrol and the military) also employ sworn officers.

The Sheriff's Department is usually responsible for incarceration of prisoners before and during trial, no matter what police agency may have handled the arrest, and for minor offenses carrying a sentence of less than one year. Convicted felons are normally incarcerated in facilities operated by the California Department of Corrections. The prosecution of alleged criminals is undertaken by the County District Attorney, and the supervision of persons on probation is undertaken by the County Department of Probation. The defense of indigents is the responsibility of the County Public Defender and Alternate Public Defender.

The system of justice is conducted under the auspices of the Superior Court system. The Court system in California has undergone important recent changes in funding and structure. In 1997 the California legislature passed the Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act, which consolidated all Court funding at the state level, and also capped the amount of money that each county would be required to contribute to the state court fund. In centralizing the funding, the legislation unlinked the contribution that each county made from the amount that each county's court might receive. In other words, each county contributes to court costs, but those costs are not necessarily proportionate to the costs associated with the court in that county. The contribution required of each county is based on its funding of state courts in fiscal year 1994-95. Furthermore, counties are required to continue funding the maintenance of court facilities, as well as those

court-related costs that are outside the statutory definition of court operations, including indigent defense, pretrial release, and probation costs.

The other change that took place in California courts within the last decade is court unification. Prior to 1998, the Constitution of the State of California provided for a two-tier system of trial courts that consisted of 58 superior courts (one in each county) and 209 municipal courts. Superior courts had jurisdiction over all felony cases and all general civil cases involving disputes over \$25,000. These courts also had jurisdiction over probate, juvenile, and family law cases. The municipal courts had jurisdiction over misdemeanor and infraction cases, civil matters involving claims of \$25,000 or less, including small claims that did not exceed \$5,000, and presided over felony arraignments and preliminary hearings to determine probable cause to hold defendants for further proceedings in superior court. On June 2, 1998, California voters approved a constitutional amendment permitting judges in each county to merge their superior and municipal courts into a single countywide court upon the vote of a majority of the county's superior court judges and a majority of its municipal court judges. San Diego unified its courts in 1998, whereupon the municipal court judges became superior court judges and thus subject to countywide election. Municipal court employees also became employees of the unified superior court, and municipal court locations became locations of the countywide superior court. All aspects of the criminal justice system, including arraignments, hearings, trials, and the handling of both misdemeanors and felonies are therefore now dealt with in the unified Superior Court.

## **California County Indigent Health Care System**

California has a complex system of health-care provision for low-income and indigent persons. The state provides funding through two separate, but related programs—Medi-Cal and the Healthy Families Program. Medi-Cal is California's implementation of the federal Medicaid Program and is oriented to qualified low income families. Eligibility for Medi-Cal is very similar to that for welfare, formerly Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) and now CalWORKs (the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Program), in that the family must have very low income and be headed by either a single parent or an unemployed parent. The Healthy Families Program is California's version of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and it began operation in 1998. It provides coverage for children through age 18 in families with incomes up to 200 percent of the FPL (federal poverty level). The Healthy Families Program has no restrictions on two-parent families or hours of work, and it has no asset limits. Although these programs are funded by the state, eligibility is determined at the county level by employees of a county's health and human services agency.

Counties may also either provide direct help or assist in the funding of necessary services for indigent uninsured persons who are not covered by any other program. Eligibility and scope of services will vary from county to county. In many counties, including San Diego, this task is largely contracted to nonprofit community clinics. Such clinics provide primary care services to a mix of Medi-Cal and uninsured low-income patients, as well as to fee-for-service patients. San Diego County does not have a county-owned or funded hospital.

Low-income and indigent health care is oriented especially to the needs of children and pregnant women. It is likely that the biggest single category of medical expense for undocumented immigrants from Mexico to California is that associated with pregnancy, delivery, and post-natal care. A child born in the U.S. to an undocumented immigrant is automatically a U.S. citizen and may be eligible for reimbursed medical care, even if the mother is not eligible. The task of determining such eligibility normally falls to workers employed by the county's health and human services agency. There is only a small chance that a non-pregnant adult

undocumented immigrant will qualify for any program of medical assistance; as a consequence, treatment provided to these individuals is normally a charity that is absorbed by the provider. It is illegal for hospitals to inquire about legal residence until after medical services have been provided, so only after-the-fact can the health care provider determine whether the person has resources to pay for himself or herself, or whether he or she is covered by insurance or by a publicly-funded program such as Medi-Cal.

## BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

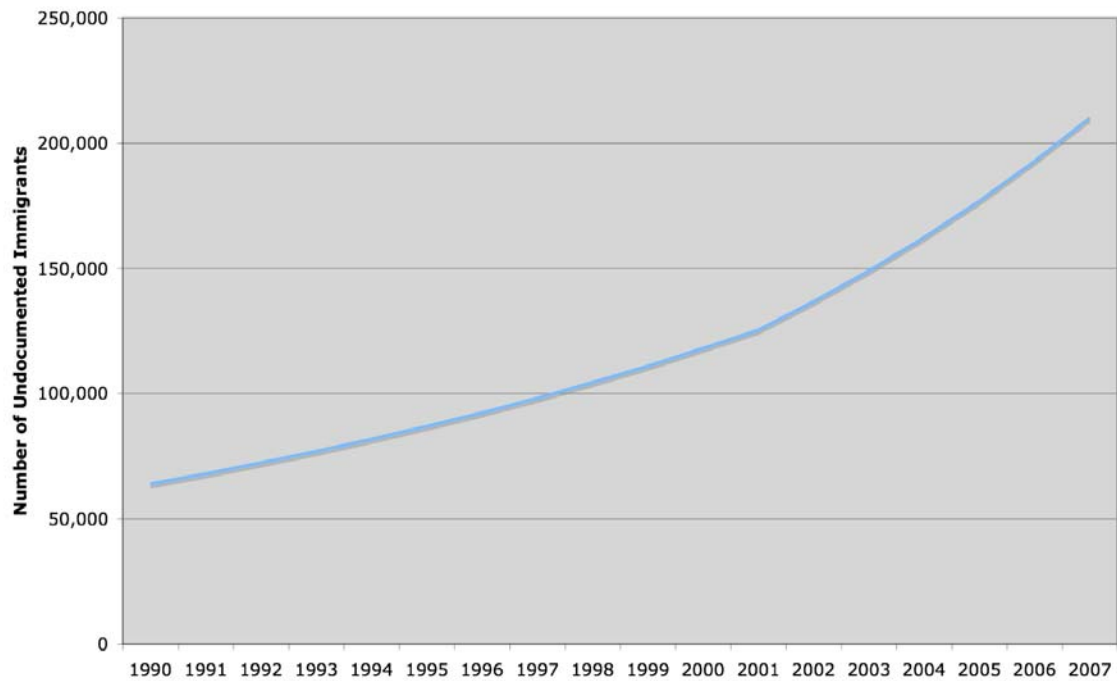
The research reported here builds on previous analyses that have attempted to answer similar questions about the fiscal impact of undocumented immigrants in San Diego County. One reason why updated estimates are important is that the number of undocumented immigrants in San Diego County is large and has almost certainly continued to grow over time, and thus the fiscal impact may be growing along with the numbers of people. Demographers at the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington, D.C., have been the leaders in estimating the total size of the undocumented immigrant population in the United States. Their latest estimate, produced in 2006 and referring to 2005, is that approximately 11 million unauthorized migrants live in the United States. They estimate that about 2.6 million of these persons live in California (Pew Hispanic Center 2006).

Although persons of Mexican and Central American origin account for only about half of all undocumented immigrants in the United States, they are estimated to account for most of the unauthorized immigrant population in California. Thus, if we assume that every county of California has undocumented immigrants in the same proportion that they have Hispanics, San Diego County's share would be 6.8 percent, based on data from the 2005 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2007) or 176,800 undocumented immigrants. **These individuals would represent about one in every five Hispanics in San Diego County (21 percent), and about 6 percent of the total San Diego County population as of 2005.** These numbers include the incarcerated population.

An earlier study by the Pew Hispanic Center had estimated that there were about 7.8 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. as of 2001 (Bean, Van Hook, and Woodrow-Lafield 2002). Assuming the same ratios by state as for the 2005 estimates (23.6 percent in California) and county (6.8 percent of California's undocumented immigrants living in San Diego), this would produce an estimate of 125,400 undocumented immigrants in San Diego County in 2001. Woodrow-Lafield (1998) used the same methods to estimate that there were approximately 4 million undocumented immigrants in the United States in 1990. If we apply the same multipliers by state and county, this would suggest that in 1990 there were 64,000 undocumented immigrants in San Diego County. Interpolating between the estimates for these years produces the trend over time shown below in Figure 1 and Table 1. Assuming that these estimates approximate the real situation in San Diego County, it can be seen that the number has increased over time, which would imply a growing demand on local tax-payer resources.

The data in Table 1 show that the undocumented population has been growing more quickly than the total population of San Diego County and thus it has been increasing as a fraction of the total population in San Diego County. The estimates suggest that in 1990, undocumented immigrants accounted for 3.2 percent of the county's population, but by 2007 this is estimated to have more than doubled to 6.8 percent.

**Figure 1**  
**Estimates of the Undocumented Immigrant Population of San Diego County**



**Table 1. Estimates of the Undocumented Population of San Diego County**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Estimated number of undocumented immigrants</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>% Undocumented</b>
1990	64,000	1,987,235	3.2
1991	68,036	2,058,329	3.3
1992	72,326	2,131,966	3.4
1993	76,886	2,208,238	3.5
1994	81,734	2,287,238	3.6
1995	86,888	2,369,064	3.7
1996	92,367	2,453,818	3.8
1997	98,191	2,541,604	3.9
1998	104,383	2,632,531	4.0
1999	110,965	2,726,710	4.1
2000	117,962	2,824,259	4.2
2001	125,400	2,863,311	4.4
2002	136,645	2,902,902	4.7
2003	148,898	2,943,042	5.1
2004	162,251	2,983,736	5.4
2005	176,800	3,024,993	5.8
2006	192,654	3,066,820	6.3
2007	209,930	3,109,226	6.8

The first attempt of which we are aware to estimate the impact of undocumented immigrants on the criminal justice and health care systems in San Diego County was conducted in 1992. State Senator William Craven, as Chair of the California State Senate's Special Committee on Border Issues, commissioned a study of the unreimbursed costs of undocumented immigrants in San Diego County. The study was conducted by Richard Parker and Louis Rea, both from San Diego State University (Parker and Rea 1993).

The Parker/Rea study was widely publicized and was presented to a panel of the National Research Council as exemplary of the kind of research that can be carried out to "know the unknowable" (Edmonston and Lee 1996) or to "count the uncountable," as Warren and Passel (1987) had put it. Parker and Rea interviewed a non-random sample of 308 undocumented immigrants to obtain behavioral information about the use of services, and about their local expenditures, and also interviewed county agency officials to obtain cost data. They estimated that the cost to the County of services delivered to undocumented immigrants in 1992 was \$64,557,029, of which \$52,996,688 was attributable to the criminal justice system, \$8,670,755 was attributable to health services and \$4,255,476 was attributable to social and public services, including education. From those totals, a lump sum of \$1,365,890 was deducted because of a general relief adjustment from the state.

The results of the Parker/Rea study were incorporated into an "invoice" that Dianne Jacob, as Chair of the Board of Supervisors at the time, requested in 1994 that the Auditor and Controller of the County of San Diego present to President Clinton (Booker 1994; Branscomb 2006). In retrospect, however, an important problem with this study was that some of the cost estimates were derived from cost-per-immigrant ratios that were based on Parker and Rea's calculation that there were 223,000 undocumented immigrants in San Diego County at that time. Our estimates, shown in Figure 1, suggest that this number was too high. Furthermore, some of the costs included in the Parker/Rea estimates, such as education and some of the health costs, were not County government expenses, even though they were expenses borne by various agencies and organizations within the county.

The second and most recent set of estimates of the county taxpayer expenses associated with undocumented immigrants was conducted under the auspices of the United States/Mexico Border Counties Coalition. In 2000, a study was prepared for all 24 border counties, including San Diego, of the expenses associated with the criminal justice system (Salant *et al.* 2001). The methodology of that study was similar to the one employed in the research reported in this study, which is described below. The result was an estimate that the cost of processing criminal illegal immigrants in San Diego County was \$39,548,440. The criminal justice impact study was followed in 2001 by another study that focused on the health care expenses associated with undocumented immigrants (MGT of America 2002).

The estimate from the health care impact study was that the uncompensated cost for San Diego County was \$76,185,000. The methodology of that study was indirect, based on a comparison of per capita expenditures in each border county with a "matched" non-border county, the difference between counties being attributed to the impact of undocumented immigrants. Because of the indirect approach taken by the researchers, it was not possible to determine which of the costs were associated specifically with County government.

## METHODS

The methods used in this study were similar to those used in the 2000 Border Counties Coalition analysis of criminal justice costs of undocumented immigrants in border counties. The approach is a direct one, in that we interviewed the administrators of those County of San Diego programs that might potentially provide services to, or be affected by, undocumented immigrants. Administrators interviewed included those in the

Public Safety Group, the Health and Human Services Agency, and, within the Land Use and Environment Group, the Parks and Recreation Department. Each person interviewed was asked to describe the type of services provided by their agency, and then was asked whether or not they or their staff members had a specific way to estimate the percentage of their client/patient base that might be composed of undocumented immigrants. Most agencies do not ask about, or keep track of, the legal residency status of people whom they serve, and as a result most persons interviewed were not able to provide us with an exact number. Thus, in the course of the in-person interviews and follow-up correspondence, we analyzed the information provided to us to generate our best guess as to the overall impact percentage. It is thus important to keep in mind that these estimates are “soft” because most agencies do not ask about immigration status. It is also the case, however, that much of the discussion about the impact centered around an impact of 10 percent. Different people at different times mentioned that number as a reasonable estimate of the impact on their program, even in the absence of “hard” data. Thus, we tended to fall back to that percentage in those instances where it was otherwise difficult to assign an impact in a program where it was nonetheless believed by staff that there was a measurable impact.

Interviews with each program administrator took place in the County’s Office of Strategy and Intergovernmental Affairs and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Often there were multiple follow-up emails, phone calls, and in some cases, additional interviews. All areas that might be impacted by undocumented immigrants were included in the study. The Public Safety Group includes the District Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender, the Alternate Public Defender, the Defense Attorney/Contract Administration, the Sheriff’s Office, the Medical Examiner, the Office of Emergency Services, the Probation Department, the Contribution to Trial Courts, and Child Support Services. The Health and Human Services Agency includes Public Health Services, Child Welfare Services, Behavioral Health Services, Aging and Independence Services, and the Strategic Planning and Operational Support Group which administers the Medi-Cal program for the County. Finally, the Parks and Recreation Department was included because they are responsible for dealing with fires and other damage and degradation caused by immigrants camping in public places.

Once a percentage impact was estimated, that was applied to the adopted budget for that agency for the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Each county agency also has indirect support from other county administrative offices and we calculated an indirect cost per agency, provided to us by the finance directors of each group. For the Health and Human Services Agency, the indirect rate was 23.7 percent, whereas for the Public Safety Group the indirect cost was estimated to be 17.6 percent. We used the latter indirect rate for the Parks and Recreation Department, as well. The sum of the impact times the budget plus the indirect government cost equaled the total dollar impact of undocumented immigrants.

## **RESULTS**

Our investigation of the impact of undocumented immigrants began with an assessment of which programs of the County of San Diego were at risk of serving undocumented immigrants. Only those departments deemed to be at-risk were evaluated. In the course of our evaluations, obtained as described above, we determined that some of the programs that might be at-risk did not, in fact, have any known connection to expenditures related to undocumented immigrants. For example, the contribution of the county to trial courts was determined to be a fixed cost that would be unaffected by undocumented immigrants, even though the latter did use the courts. The results discussed below therefore focus only on those programs for which a non-negligible impact was identified.



## Public Safety Group

### District Attorney

The District Attorney's Office does not collect data on the immigration status of defendants. However, they do provide a considerable amount of service and support related to the prosecution of undocumented immigrants arrested for crimes, as well as to the victims of those crimes. Although the level of support and services related to undocumented immigrants is not directly quantified, it is estimated that 6.5 percent of defendants are undocumented persons. The FY 2006-07 budget of the District Attorney was \$118,940,401, to which we applied the impact of 6.5 percent, for a direct cost of \$7,731,126, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$1,360,678, for a total impact of \$9,091,804.

#### Impact on District Attorney

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$118,940,401	6.5%	\$7,731,126	\$1,360,678	\$9,091,804

### Sheriff

The San Diego Sheriff's Department (SDSO) does collect some data on undocumented persons in detention. Staff reports that the presence of federal immigration authorities in County jails has increased and that County detention staff are now more likely than in the past to learn if inmates are illegally in the United States. SDSO also collects this information in order to prepare a request for federal reimbursement from the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP). This program provides partial reimbursement to county governments for the detention costs of illegal aliens arrested and found guilty of 2 or more misdemeanors, or a felony, and who have served at least 4 days in custody. SCAAP reimbursement for 2006 was \$2,291,652, which was subtracted from the impact total. The current measure of an undocumented person in custody is likely to underreport some persons, such as those sent to State prison with an immigration "hold" (a detention order to be executed at the time of release from State custody) that was unknown to SDSO, drunks released after they sober up, and persons who bail out quickly. Thus, the SDSO estimate is likely to be an underestimate of the total impact. The SDSO staff estimated that there is an 8 percent impact on detention costs associated with undocumented immigrants. We then applied that percentage to all SDSO operations based on the assumption that, although not measured, the detention costs reflect impacts that radiate proportionately through all SDSO operations.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Sheriff was \$540,421,248, to which we applied the impact of 8.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$43,233,700, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$7,609,131, and from which we subtracted the 2006 SCAAP payment of \$2,291,652 from the U.S. Department of Justice, for a total impact of \$48,551,179.

#### Impact on Sheriff

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$540,421,248	8.0%	\$43,233,700	\$7,609,131	\$48,551,179

### Public Defender

The Public Defender is mandated by the Court not to collect data on the immigration status of clients, in order to prevent any bias to representation that might be induced by that information. However, given the role of the Public Defender in providing legal representation to indigent persons accused of crimes, it is

reasonable to believe that a disproportionate share of the Public Defender's work load involves undocumented immigrants. The BCC study in 2000 found that whereas the District Attorney spent 6.4 percent of its resources on undocumented immigrants, the Public Defender spent 9.1 percent of its resources in that way. Thus, we applied the same ratio and have estimated that 9.2 percent of the Public Defender's costs are associated with undocumented immigrants.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Public Defender was \$50,787,795, to which we applied the impact of 9.2 percent, for a direct cost of \$4,672,477, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$822,356, for a total impact of \$5,494,833.

#### **Impact on Public Defender**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$50,787,795	9.2%	\$4,672,477	\$822,356	\$5,494,833

#### **Alternate Public Defender**

The Alternate Public Defender provides criminal defense services to indigents who are unable to be served by the Public Defender. They too are unable to collect information on undocumented immigrants, and so we have applied the same impact that was applied to the Public Defender—9.2 percent.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Alternate Public Defender was \$15,101,253, to which we applied the impact of 9.2 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,389,315, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$244,519, for a total impact of \$1,633,835.

#### **Impact on Alternate Public Defender**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$15,101,253	9.2%	\$1,389,315	\$244,519	\$1,633,835

#### **Probation—Adult Field Services**

The San Diego County Probation Department serves about 20,000 adults at any one time. As of May 2007 there were 19,695 adults on formal probation of whom 2,040 were determined to be undocumented, representing 10.4 percent of the caseload. The majority of these offenders have been deported, but because they often return, and re-offend, the Probation Department must track them.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Adult Field Services program within the Probation Department was \$38,941,757, to which we applied the impact of 10.4 percent, for a direct cost of \$4,033,571, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$709,909, for a total impact of \$4,743,480.

#### **Impact on Probation—Adult Field Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$38,941,757	10.4%	\$4,033,571	\$709,909	\$4,743,480

#### **Probation—Juvenile Field Services and Institutional Services**

It is known that undocumented immigrants are included among the juveniles who are investigated, incarcerated, supervised, and placed in residential settings. For the most part, data are not collected on immigration status of juveniles, but even if data were collected, the information would almost certainly

understate the overall impact of undocumented immigrants, because some of the children who are in the juvenile system are themselves citizens as a result of being born in the United States, yet they were born to parents who were undocumented immigrants. It is known that 4.5 percent of juveniles currently in placement in the juvenile system are undocumented. All of them have been approved for the Permanently Residing Under the Color of Law (PRUCOL) Doctrine. We have assumed that this number is a reasonable approximation of the overall impact of undocumented immigrants on the juvenile system.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Juvenile Field Services and Institutional Services programs within the Probation Department was \$100,397,231, to which we applied the impact of 4.5 percent, for a direct cost of \$4,517,875, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$795,146, for a total impact of \$5,313,021.

**Impact on Probation—Juvenile Field Services and Institutional Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$100,397,231	4.5%	\$4,517,875	\$795,146	\$5,313,021

**Medical Examiner**

The Office of the Medical Examiner (ME) completed 2,703 autopsies in fiscal year 2006. They determined that 42 of them, or 2%, were the remains of undocumented persons. Deaths of undocumented persons can sometimes occur in wilderness areas during attempts to cross the border. These autopsies can be expensive because of the need to use the contract forensic anthropologist to assist in identifying the remains and the need for extensive work by ME investigators because bodies may not carry identification or have records in US databases.

The FY 2006-07 budget of the Medical Examiner was \$7,638,378, to which we applied the impact of 2.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$155,424, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$27,355, for a total impact of \$182,779.

**Impact on Medical Examiner**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$7,638,378	2.0%	\$155,424	\$27,355	\$182,779

## **Health and Human Services Agency**

**Aging and Independence Services (AIS)**

AIS provides in-home supportive services and nutrition services primarily to older adults throughout the County. Service providers include 110 home and community based contractors and 23 nutrition contractors serving 56 locations. Title III of the Older Americans Act discourages states and local area agencies on aging from requiring intake information that might serve as an impediment to accessing services. As a result, AIS collects no data on immigration status. A survey of 23 nutrition contractors by County staff reported less than one percent of congregate meal recipients are undocumented persons.

The Adult Protective Services program carries a caseload of about 1000 persons and served about 7300 during fiscal year 2006. Most new cases are closed within a month. It is estimated that approximately 20-30 clients annually are undocumented. The programs within AIS that were deemed to experience an impact from undocumented immigrants included Nutrition, Senior Employment (Title V), Multi-Purpose Senior Services

Programs, Case Management, Linkages, Mental Health Senior Team, and the Caregiver Program. We estimated the impact to average 0.5 percent.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the relevant programs of Aging and Independence Services was a combined \$14,350,290, to which we applied the impact of 0.5 percent, for a direct cost of \$71,751, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$17,005, for a total impact of \$88,757.

#### **Impact on Adult and Independence Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$14,350,290	0.5%	\$71,751	\$17,005	\$88,757

### **Behavioral Health Services**

**San Diego Psychiatric Hospital** The San Diego Psychiatric Hospital consists of the emergency psychiatric unit (EPU), 30 in-patient beds and a crisis walk-in clinic. A subcontractor operates the 62-bed long-term unit. The average length of stay in the acute facility is 10 days, and 24-36 hours in the EPU. The mission of the program is to provide acute psychiatric care to mentally ill indigent patients. Duplicated patient count for 2006 is 12,000 stays, including 800 in-patient. It is estimated that 10% of the patients served are undocumented immigrants largely because they are indigent and non-English-speaking. A recent check of 13 patients served by one of the inpatient teams showed that 10 of 13 patients spoke a language other than English as their primary language.

The FY 2006-07 budget for San Diego Psychiatric Hospital was \$15,976,886, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,597,689, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$378,652, for a total impact of \$1,976,341.

#### **Impact on San Diego Psychiatric Hospital**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$15,976,886	10.0%	\$1,597,689	\$378,652	\$1,976,341

**Forensic-Children's Mental Health Services** The Forensics program within the Children's Mental Health Services program provides court-ordered competency determinations for both criminal and civil defendants and persons needing public conservatorship services, and evaluation services to offenders on conditional release. About 80% of the 17,000 children they served in 2006 were Medicaid eligible and therefore unlikely to be undocumented. About 90% of the adults served are indigent. Although staff was unable to provide a direct estimate of the impact of undocumented immigrants, the discussion of services provided and the nature of the persons being served suggested that it was reasonable to assume that the impact was approximately 10 percent.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Forensics program of Children's Mental Health Services was estimated to be \$6,918,255, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$691,826, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$163,963, for a total impact of \$855,788.

#### **Impact on Forensic-Children's Mental Health Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$6,918,255	10.0%	\$691,826	\$163,963	\$855,788

**Alcohol and Other Drug Services** Alcohol and Other Drug Services contracts with providers to offer treatment resources to adolescents, criminal justice programs, women's services, and prevention. A survey of recent admissions estimated that about 3.4% of new clients (125/3,642) were undocumented immigrants.

The FY 2006-07 budget for Alcohol and Other Drug Services was \$45,205,325, to which we applied the impact of 3.4 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,536,981, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$364,265, for a total impact of \$1,901,246.

**Impact on Alcohol and Other Drug Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$45,205,325	3.4%	\$1,536,981	\$364,265	\$1,901,246

**Child Welfare Services**

**Foster care** About 7,000 children are in foster care at any one time. Child Welfare Services receives about 38,000 referrals annually, of which about 25,000 are referred for investigation. Staff performed an analysis of current caseloads and concluded that about one percent of children in placement at any one time are undocumented.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Foster Care program of Child Welfare Services was \$175,092,942, to which we applied the impact of 1.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,750,929, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$414,970, for a total impact of \$2,165,900.

**Impact on Foster Care**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$175,092,942	1.0%	\$1,750,929	\$414,970	\$2,165,900

**Public Health Services**

**Maternal, Child and Family Health** The Maternal, Child and Family Health (MCFH) program is primarily a referral program using County contractors. The MCFH staff provides access, oversight, and quality assurance. Undocumented pregnant women can be served and receive pre-natal care, delivery, and post-partum care for 2 months, although the program collects no data on immigration status, and thus was unable to provide us with an estimate. About 3,000 women are served annually. Our estimate of the impact of undocumented immigrants begins with the premise that pregnant and early post-partum women represent the majority of clients/patients for the program. According to the California Center for Health Statistics, 42 percent of births in San Diego in 2004 (the most recent year available) were born to women who were born outside the United States. According to the American Community Survey, there were 659,731 foreign-born persons in San Diego in 2005, and our estimates (see Table 1) indicate that among these were 176,800 undocumented immigrants in San Diego County in that year. Thus, 27 percent of the foreign-born population is estimated to be undocumented. If we apply this percentage to pregnant women, we would estimate that 27 percent of 42 percent—11 percent—of pregnant women are undocumented immigrants. We use this figure as the estimate of the overall impact of undocumented immigrants on this program.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Maternal, Child and Family Health program was \$8,942,473, to which we applied the impact of 11.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$983,672, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$233,130, for a total impact of \$1,216,802.

**Impact on Maternal, Child and Family Health**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$8,942,473	11.0%	\$983,672	\$233,130	\$1,216,802

**Surveillance** The Surveillance program incorporates the Public Health Lab, the Epidemiology program, and the Vital Records program. Among the many things done by these programs, they track community-wide data on medical conditions as required by California Administrative Code Section 1700. Depending upon the disease, the County may individually track the treatment and recovery of patients, paralleling their non-government treatment provider. The Branch does not collect nationality or immigration status data, although it has followed the treatment of undocumented persons in the past. For example, in 1991, a migrant camp in North County experienced a malaria outbreak and arrangements were made for weekly blood testing and treatment, thus successfully controlling the outbreak. Most reporting of communicable disease is done by physicians. Since undocumented persons are largely uninsured and may not have a personal physician, they may be unlikely to be caught in the surveillance screen, thus the numbers of undocumented persons tracked by the County's surveillance may be low. At the same time, undocumented immigrants may be the source of diseases that are then reported to the County. We estimate the impact to be one percent.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Surveillance program within Public Health Services was \$11,169,702, to which we applied the impact of 1.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$111,697, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$26,472, for a total impact of \$138,169.

**Impact on Public Health Surveillance**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$11,169,702	1.0%	\$111,697	\$26,472	\$138,169

**Immunization** The Immunization Branch provides vaccinations for preschoolers, community education, and flu vaccine in the event of a pandemic. Vaccinations are available if a patient meets at least 1 of 4 criteria: (1) American Indian or Alaskan native, (2) no insurance, (3) underinsured, or (4) Medi-Cal eligible. Services are tracked in a database which shows that five percent of recipients have no San Diego County zip code. It is estimated that this corresponds closely to the number of Mexican residents and undocumented persons who access the program. Anecdotally, it is reported that the demand for immunization is higher on days that are Mexican holidays.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Immunization program within Public Health Services was \$5,253,226, to which we applied the impact of 5.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$262,661, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$62,251, for a total impact of \$324,912.

**Impact on Immunization**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$5,253,226	5.0%	\$262,661	\$62,251	\$324,912

**HIV/STD/Hepatitis Program** This infectious disease control program offers HIV prevention services, testing, counseling, and some treatment as well as STD clinic care. The program uses 50 contracts with 35 different care providers. Federal law does not require legal status for access to services, but the County does require residency within the County to receive services. It is estimated that 30 percent of enrollees in the program are Hispanic and that 22 percent of Hispanic enrollees are undocumented persons. Thus, the impact is 22 percent of 30 percent, or 6.6 percent.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the HIV/STD/Hepatitis program within Public Health Services was \$17,117,909, to which we applied the impact of 6.6 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,129,782, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$267,758, for a total impact of \$1,397,540.

**Impact on HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Branches**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$17,117,909	6.6%	\$1,129,782	\$267,758	\$1,397,540

**Public Health Clinics**

The Public Health Clinics provide care to County residents with nurses in the field and at public health nursing clinics, operating in each of the County's six regions. During FY 2005-06, for example, the nurses served 2,079 patients in the clinics, immunized 18,000 individuals, and had about 3,000 open cases served by field nurses. The group does not collect data on immigration status, and was not able to offer a direct estimate. Since clients seen in the clinics are not asked about their legal status, it is reasonable to assume that many of the clients are, in fact, undocumented. Given that approximately 7 percent of the population is undocumented, but that they are generally lower income and have few alternate resources, thus leading to a potentially disproportionate motivation to use the Public Health Clinics, we concluded that it reasonable to estimate that 10 percent of the total caseload is represented by undocumented immigrants.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Public Health Clinics among the six regions was \$16,919,141, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$1,691,914, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$400,984, for a total impact of \$2,092,898.

**Impact on Public Health Clinics**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$16,919,141	10.0%	\$1,691,914	\$400,984	\$2,092,898

**TB Clinic and Refugee Health Services**

Unlike other County health programs, the TB program actually provides direct care by co-managing patients with their own doctor, providing TB treatment (about half the caseload of 1,700 patients), or observing therapy. The Service evaluates several thousand people each year. It is estimated that 10 percent of the caseload is accounted for by undocumented immigrants.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the TB Clinic and Refugee Health Services was \$6,581,944, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$658,194, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$155,992, for a total impact of \$814,186.

### **Impact on TB and Refugee Health Services**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$6,581,944	10.0%	\$658,194	\$155,992	\$814,186

### **San Diego County Medi-Cal Administration (MA)**

The San Diego County Medi-Cal Administration office administers the County Medicaid program. The State pays providers for service and most providers are not County offices or employees. MA administrative costs for FY 2006 were approximately \$80 million. The County does not track provider costs. It is estimated that about 10 percent of Medi-Cal-eligible persons at any one time are undocumented immigrants, and that the number of pregnant undocumented Medi-Cal-eligible women is pretty constant at 3,000 at any one time. The cost to the County is in administering the MA program only, not in the provision of services.

The County-funded portion of the FY 2006-07 budget for the administration of Medi-Cal services was estimated to be \$80,000,000, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$8,000,000, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$1,896,000, for a total impact of \$9,896,000.

### **Impact on Medi-Cal Administration**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$80,000,000	10.0%	\$8,000,000	\$1,896,000	\$9,896,000

## **Land Use and Environmental Group**

### **Department of Parks and Recreation**

County parks include 98 parks covering 41,000 acres. Undocumented persons have an impact on park operations in several ways. First, camps used by persons illegally here are often more obscured than other migrant camps, and are often near a water course, thus creating storm water contamination from a mix of refuse and human waste. During FY 2006 the Department spent about \$115,000 in direct costs cleaning up such migrant camps. Beyond that, however, the Department must also respond to complaints each year typically coming from residents about the improper use of park facilities by migrants. Additionally, each year there are wilderness fires of suspicious origin that Department staff suspect were caused by migrant cooking fires, and we know from our own research that many of the 80,000 undocumented persons apprehended each year in the county have crossed through park space during their movement north causing habitat destruction that must be dealt with (see, for example, McIntyre and Weeks 2002). As a consequence of these multiple environmental impacts of undocumented immigrants, we believe that it is reasonable to estimate that undocumented immigrants may account for as much as 10 percent of the department's use of resources.

The FY 2006-07 budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation was \$30,739,211, to which we applied the impact of 10.0 percent, for a direct cost of \$3,073,921, to which we added the General Government indirect cost of \$541,010, for a total impact of \$3,614,931.

### **Impact on Parks and Recreation**

Budget	Impact	Direct Cost	Gen Gov	Total Cost
\$30,739,211	10.0%	\$3,073,921	\$541,010	\$3,614,931



## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The impact results discussed above by department are summarized below in Table 2, where it can be seen that the total estimated impact is \$101,494,401 for fiscal year 2006-2007.

**Table 2. Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in FY 2006-2007 by County Program**

Category Program		Budget	Percent of effort spent on Undocumented Immigrants	Direct Cost of Undocumented Immigrants	General Government (indirect) expense	Total Cost (Impact) of Undocumented Immigrants
Public Safety Group	District Attorney	\$118,940,401	6.5%	\$7,731,126	\$1,360,678	\$9,091,804
	Sheriff	\$540,421,248	8.0%	\$43,233,700	\$7,609,131	\$48,551,179
	Public Defender	\$50,787,795	9.2%	\$4,672,477	\$822,356	\$5,494,833
	Alternate Public Defender	\$15,101,253	9.2%	\$1,389,315	\$244,519	\$1,633,835
	Probation--Adult Field Services	\$38,941,757	10.4%	\$4,033,571	\$709,909	\$4,743,480
	Probation--Juvenile Field Services and Institutional Services	\$100,397,231	4.5%	\$4,517,875	\$795,146	\$5,313,021
	Medical Examiner	\$7,638,378	2.0%	\$155,424	\$27,355	\$182,779
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$872,228,063</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>\$65,733,489</b>	<b>\$11,569,094</b>	<b>\$75,010,931</b>
Health and Human Services	Aging and Independence Services (Senior Health and Social Services and Protective Services)	\$14,350,290	0.5%	\$71,751	\$17,005	\$88,757
	Behavioral Health Services					
	San Diego Psychiatric Hospital	\$15,976,886	10.0%	\$1,597,689	\$378,652	\$1,976,341
	Forensic-Children's Mental Health Services	\$6,918,255	10.0%	\$691,826	\$163,963	\$855,788
	Alcohol and Other Drug Services	\$45,205,325	3.4%	\$1,536,981	\$364,265	\$1,901,246
	Child Welfare Services (Foster Care)	\$175,092,942	1.0%	\$1,750,929	\$414,970	\$2,165,900
	Public Health Services					
	Maternal, Child and Family Health	\$8,942,473	11.0%	\$983,672	\$233,130	\$1,216,802
	Surveillance	\$11,169,702	1.0%	\$111,697	\$26,472	\$138,169
	Immunization	\$5,253,226	5.0%	\$262,661	\$62,251	\$324,912
	HIV/STD/Hepatitis	\$17,117,909	6.6%	\$1,129,782	\$267,758	\$1,397,540
	Public Health Clinics	\$16,919,141	10.0%	\$1,691,914	\$400,984	\$2,092,898
	TB and Refugee Health Services	\$6,581,944	10.0%	\$658,194	\$155,992	\$814,186
	Medicaid Program Administration	\$80,000,000	10.0%	\$8,000,000	\$1,896,000	\$9,896,000
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$403,528,093</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>\$18,487,097</b>	<b>\$4,381,442</b>	<b>\$22,868,539</b>
Other	Parks and Recreation	30,739,211	10.0%	\$3,073,921	\$541,010	\$3,614,931
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$1,306,495,367</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>\$87,294,507</b>	<b>\$16,491,546</b>	<b>\$101,494,401</b>

Of this total impact, \$75,010,931 is attributable to costs associated with the criminal justice impact of undocumented immigrants, and the remainder (\$26,483,470) is due to health and human service and environmental impacts.

The total impact of \$101 million shown in Table 2 can be divided by the estimated number of undocumented immigrants in 2006 to produce a per undocumented immigrant impact of \$527 per year. Looked at from the taxpayer cost perspective, the cost per resident of San Diego County in 2006 was \$35.31.

If we assume that the cost per undocumented immigrant is fixed and is expressed in 2006 dollars, then we can project the total cost of undocumented immigrants backwards and forwards, based on the annual change in the number of undocumented persons, as shown in Table 1. We can also calculate annual estimates of the total population of San Diego County in order show the change over time in the cost of each undocumented immigrant per legal resident of San Diego County. These calculations are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Calculation of Annual Impact of Undocumented Immigrants,  
Based on 2006 Analysis, in Constant Dollars**

Year	Estimated number of undocumented immigrants	Cost per undocumented immigrant, based on 2006 estimate	Total cost to SD County of criminal justice, medical and social services provided by the County to undocumented immigrants in constant dollars	Legal resident population	Cost per resident in constant dollars, 2006 study
1990	64,000	527	33,716,588	1,923,235	17.53
1991	68,036	527	35,842,621	1,990,293	18.01
1992	72,326	527	38,102,713	2,059,640	18.50
1993	76,886	527	40,505,318	2,131,351	19.00
1994	81,734	527	43,059,421	2,205,504	19.52
1995	86,888	527	45,774,576	2,282,176	20.06
1996	92,367	527	48,660,937	2,361,451	20.61
1997	98,191	527	51,729,301	2,443,413	21.17
1998	104,383	527	54,991,144	2,528,148	21.75
1999	110,965	527	58,458,665	2,615,745	22.35
2000	117,962	527	62,144,835	2,706,297	22.96
2001	125,400	527	66,063,439	2,737,911	24.13
2002	136,645	527	71,987,544	2,766,257	26.02
2003	148,898	527	78,442,882	2,794,143	28.07
2004	162,251	527	85,477,089	2,821,485	30.30
2005	176,800	527	93,142,074	2,848,193	32.70
<b>2006</b>	<b>192,654</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>101,494,401</b>	<b>2,874,166</b>	<b>35.31</b>
2007	209,930	527	110,595,706	2,899,296	38.15

Multiplying the cost per immigrant that we have estimated for FY2006-2007 times the estimated number of undocumented immigrants each year gives us the estimated total annual cost of providing services to undocumented immigrants. As can be seen in Table 3, if the number of undocumented immigrants in 2006 had been unchanged from the estimate for 1990, then the county would have spent \$34 million in 2006 dealing with undocumented immigrants, instead of \$101 million. A tripling of such immigrants obviously triples their absolute impact on county government.

We can also divide the annual cost by the total number of legal residents of the county (the estimated total population minus the estimated number of undocumented immigrants). This gives us the cost per legal resident in constant dollars. Since the total population of the county was growing more slowly than the undocumented immigrant population, the result is a noticeable rise over time in the per person impact on county residents. In 1990, the impact per legal resident would have been \$17.53, whereas by 2007 it has increased to \$38.15.

The limitations of our data and analysis must be kept in mind when interpreting our results. Our calculations are based on estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants per year in the county, rather than a direct count (which will probably never exist). Our estimates of the impact on county services are made difficult by the fact that most agencies do not keep records of the legal status of people served. Indeed, in some cases, they are expressly forbidden from doing so. Thus, it is probably impossible to ever know the exact impact of undocumented immigrants.

Another important limitation is that the direct costs to San Diego County of undocumented immigrants may well be higher than it seems, especially given the costs associated with U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants. For example, data from the county's CalWORKs program show that in 2006 there were 20,996 adults and 49,284 children in the households of people receiving assistance. However, within that group there were 9,794 household members who were not direct recipients of assistance because they were ineligible. The most common reason for ineligibility is lack of legal status. If we assumed that all of the ineligible persons were undocumented parents of their U.S.-born children, and if we assumed that they had an average of 2.35 children (the ratio of children to adults in CalWORKs), then the absence of undocumented immigrants would have produced a 38 percent reduction in the number of cases. If the ineligible persons were evenly divided between adults and children, the absence of the undocumented persons would have reduced the caseload by 19 percent.

A similar situation prevails in the County's Food Stamp program. In 2006 there were 43,446 adults and 62,669 persons living in households served by that program, of whom 12,691 were ineligible to receive benefits themselves. Once again, if we assumed that all of the ineligible persons were undocumented parents of their U.S.-born children, and if we assumed that they had an average of 1.44 children (the ratio of children to adults in the Food Stamp program), then the absence of undocumented immigrants would have produced a 20 percent reduction in the number of eligible cases. If the ineligible persons were evenly divided between adults and children, the absence of undocumented persons would have reduced the caseload by 10 percent.

Another important community cost associated with the children of undocumented immigrants, if not undocumented immigrants themselves, is for education. The education of all children is vital to the economic development of the county and these costs are almost certainly inflated on a per student basis when the parents lack legal status and may have less ability to support their children's educational program. However, as noted previously, these are community costs that are not borne by County government.

It is likely that the single biggest cost to the county (but not to the county government) of undocumented immigrants is unreimbursed emergency medical care. The Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties has developed an information system that tracks the treatment and expenditures of the 19 hospital emergency departments in the two counties. It is estimated that 25 percent of emergency room admissions in San Diego County are undocumented immigrants. According to Hospital Association estimates, the uncompensated ER care for FY 2006 was \$619,665,764. The Association has no estimate of in-patient care cost for undocumented persons. Applying the uncompensated care cost to the impact of 25.0 percent produces a direct cost of 154,916,441. This is a cost of \$804 per undocumented immigrant in 2006; or \$53.90 per legal resident of the county. This represents a genuinely substantial impact to the community, but it is not a direct impact on the costs of County government.

To the extent that the 2006 estimate of unreimbursed emergency medical costs is comparable to the 2001 estimate produced by the Border Counties Coalition, the data suggest that the cost per undocumented immigrant has risen considerably from \$607 in 2001 (expressed in constant dollars), to \$804 in 2006. The cost of these services per legal resident increased from \$27.83 in 2001 (expressed in constant dollars) to \$53.90 in 2006—nearly a doubling in only five years, although as noted above this is a community expense, but not a county government expense.

The increase in health costs associated with undocumented immigrants is consistent with our calculations that the costs related to the processing of criminal undocumented immigrants have also increased, and these latter costs are borne directly by county government. As noted above, we estimate that \$75 million was spent from the San Diego County general fund in processing criminal undocumented immigrants in FY 2006. Thus, each resident of the county paid approximately \$24.50 to fund these services. This represented a substantial absolute dollar increase from the estimated impact of \$34,152,708 for the comparable services in FY 1999, which amounted to \$11.96 per resident. This is a huge increase over time, even taking the increase in prices into account over that time. In constant dollars, the 1999 figure would have inflated from \$34 million to \$41 million in 2006. This means that, even taking the consumer price index into account, over this span of time there was nearly a doubling of the impact of criminal undocumented immigrants on the residents of San Diego County. This is not too surprising, since our estimates suggest that the undocumented immigrant population itself nearly doubled over this period of time—from 110,965 in 1999 to 192,654 in 2006. Yet, it can be seen that the costs per undocumented have nonetheless increased even faster than the immigrant population itself, presumably reflecting an increase in the costs to the County of its overall operations.

We conclude with the reminder that our focus in this report has been to estimate the costs to the County government associated with undocumented immigrants. There is no question that undocumented immigrants earn money that is spent within the county and thus they make a variety of economic contributions to the county. We did not attempt in this study to estimate how much of that is returned directly to the County as revenue, which would be the relevant calculation given our focus on County government impacts.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF THE AUTHORS

Dr. John R. Weeks is Professor of Geography and Director of the International Population Center at San Diego State University. He is also Clinical Professor of Family and Preventive Medicine at UCSD School of Medicine. He received his A.B. in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1966; his M.A. in Demography from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1969, and his Ph.D. in Demography from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1972. He taught at Michigan State University for three years (1971-74) prior to accepting an appointment at San Diego State University (in his home town of San Diego), where he has been since 1974, initially in the Department of Sociology, and since 1992 in the Department of Geography. In the past several years Dr. Weeks has been funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the National Science Foundation and currently the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to investigate the application of remote sensing, GIS, and spatial statistics to issues of spatial variability in health. He is currently the Principal Investigator of a five-year, \$5 million NICHD-funded study "Health, Poverty and Place: Modeling Inequalities in Accra Using RS and GIS." He is also a Co-Principal Investigator on a NASA REASoN project titled "A Border Security Decision Support System Driven by Remotely Sensed Data Inputs" (Douglas Stow, PI), and Co-PI on an National Cancer Institute project, "Multi-level Assessment of Indoor Tanning Practices" (Joni Mayer, PI). Dr. Weeks has published widely, and the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of his textbook on Population has just been released. He has also been an expert witness on demography and statistics in more than 200 criminal and civil cases. Dr. Weeks was one of the co-authors of the Border Counties Coalition Report in 20001 on "Illegal Immigrants in U.S.-Mexico Border Counties: Costs of Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice, and Emergency Medical Services." More information is available at: <http://geography.sdsu.edu/People/Faculty/weeks.html>.

Dr. David M. Eisenberg is a fourteen-year veteran of the Chula Vista Police Department, who recently resigned from the Department to accept a new position in Washington, D.C. His assignments in Chula Vista included patrol, the Street Team (targeted enforcement), narcotics, the US Customs Marine/Air Task Force, and community relations. He has supervised the department's Psychiatric Emergency Response Team and the International Liaison Unit. In this last role, he was responsible for managing the bilateral relationship between the Department and its Mexican counterparts. He is also a border studies scholar with a special interest in border community crime and disorder. He holds a Masters and Doctorate from the Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. Dr. Eisenberg can be reached at [dmeisenberg@aol.com](mailto:dmeisenberg@aol.com).

**Estimating the Cost to the County of San Diego, California,  
of Services Delivered to Undocumented Immigrants  
During FY 2006-07**

John R. Weeks, Ph.D.  
and  
David M. Eisenberg, Ph.D.

Prepared for the County of San Diego

September 2007

**ERRATA SHEET**

On page 22 of the report we say the following:

“The Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties has developed an information system that tracks the treatment and expenditures of the 19 hospital emergency departments in the two counties. It is estimated that 25 percent of emergency room admissions in San Diego County are undocumented immigrants. According to Hospital Association estimates, the uncompensated ER care for FY 2006 was \$619,665,764. The Association has no estimate of in-patient care cost for undocumented persons.”

Although we were provided the numerical information in that paragraph by the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties, they did not themselves produce the estimates. The 25 percent impact estimate was derived from a US-Mexico Border Health Commission report published in 2002. Furthermore, the dollar figure for uncompensated care refers to all costs, not just for emergency care, and was derived by the California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development.

We regret the error, and hope that readers of the report will make the appropriate corrections in their copy.